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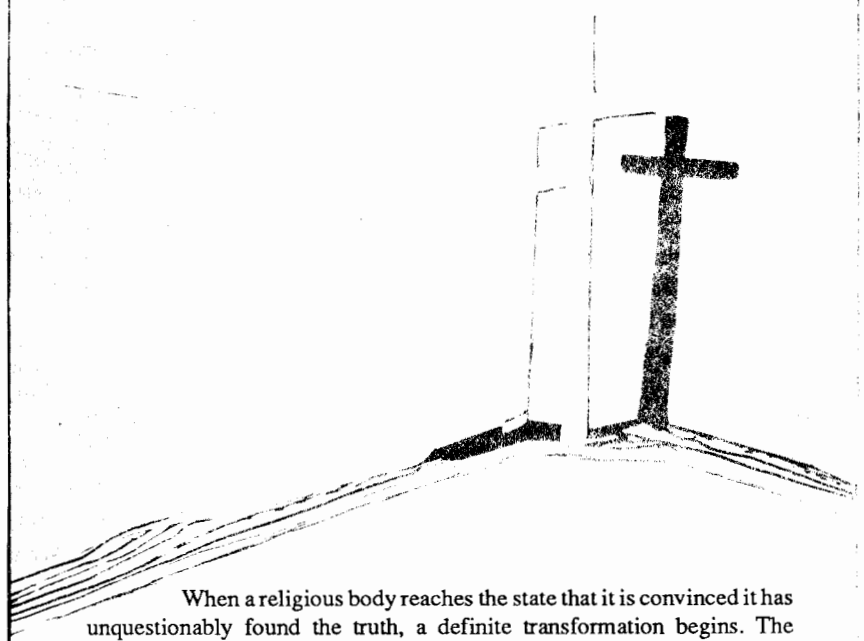

When a religious body reaches the state that it is convinced it has unquestionably found the truth, a definite transformation begins. The members no longer search for better understanding. Truths which were found crystallize into fixed positions. There is no longer room for differences. — David Chadwell in *Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees*

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Volume 33, No. 9 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **November, 1991**

What the Old Testament Means to Us. . .No. 9

THREE DEADLY SINS

We learn a lot about a person by what he hates as well as loves, by what he's against as well as for, and by what he believes to be wrong as well as right. It is also true of a nation, as we learned in the case of Nazi Germany. In the time of Hitler something drastic happened to Germany's sense of values, even though at the time it was one of the world's most enlightened nations. We need to examine our own values when one can write from a presumably peaceful American city and talk about living in a "War Zone," as a minister does in a church bulletin out of Houston, referring to a dozen murders in that city within a few days. But murder and crime in our streets are but the beginning of the ills that plague our nation. What has happened to our values in this generation may well be reflected in the title of Dr. Karl Menninger's book, *Whatever Happened To Sin?*

Our study of the Old Testament in terms of what it means to us is the study of a nation, a nation that began when the God of heaven called one man to be the father of his special people. God called Abraham because he was a man of faith, and so Israel became a nation founded upon faith. The Old Testament is therefore the story of Israel's faith, which was not always triumphant. The people's faith was always in a struggle with a deadly and persistent plague, *sin*.

It would serve us well to learn what Israel thought about sin, its origin and nature, its power and dominion, its penalty and cure (if any). While it is a subject too vast for a single article, we can at least get inside the subject by looking at it from one angle, what Israel came to regard as the three worst sins. Such a subject should help Christians to realize that *some sins are far more serious than other sins*, a truth we are often slow in accepting. Another truism to keep in mind is *where there is no God there is no sin.* If Judaism gives us a deeper understanding of the nature of God, it gives us a better understanding of the nature of sin.

The three deadly sins of Judaism, as suggested by their rabbis, were heathenism (idolatry), murder (unjustifiable homicide), and incest (along with all sexual sins). These were deemed so serious as to be almost unforgivable. While all three sins are overt, they are first of all sins of the heart, which are more serious than sins of the flesh. They are rebellion against the authority of God and an encroachment upon His holiness. To murder is more than taking the life of another; it is to destroy one who is made in the image of God. Heathenism is to act as if there is no God, or, if there be a God, He does not matter. To make anything an idol is to displace the God who created us. To commit adultery or any form of sexual perversion, is to treat wantonly what God has made holy. All three sins reflect a heart that has turned from God.

Sins of the heart! These are the sins that matter most, and when Jesus spoke of

such sins he was on familiar ground with informed Jews. They understood, as our Lord taught, that adultery is first of all in the heart, and it remains sinful even if itgoes no further than one's thinking. Jesus insisted that it is from the heart that evil comes, and he named such sins: lust, theft, murder, greed, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, arrogance, folly (Mk. 7:21-22, Phillips). When he taught that all such sins come from inside the person, from his heart and mind, and that it is these things more than externals that defile the person, it was good Judaism even if some Pharisees saw sin mostly in terms of externals.

This gets at the heart of the nature of sin, and this is why sin must be taken seriously. Religion never goes deep when sin is treated lightly. Even Christians are often like the fashionable women at a garden party, who, when told that a lion was loose and only a short distance away, responded with, "Really?," as she took another bite of her cucumber salad. In a world where sin is taken lightly, it is difficult even for believers to hear the Bible's warning: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Responsible thinkers through the centuries have attempted to pinpoint the meaning of sin. Theologians get close when they see sin as centered in pride and inordinate self-love. Augustine classed all sin as either carnalities (of the flesh) or animosities (of the soul and mind). He wisely observed that it is not fleshly sins that corrupt the soul, but the sinful soul that corrupts the flesh. That is, it isn't "sowing wild oats" that blemishes a young man's soul, but it is the blemished soul that leads to his profligacy.

Some recent theologians, like Reinhold Niebuhr, have referred to pride as the primal sin, whether of men or of angels. Niebuhr especially has projected sin in our materialistic world as the pride of power. We all want power over others, and so we use money, position, fame, sex — and even knowledge, virtue, and religion — to dominate others. Niebuhr has probably done more than any other theologian to alert the consciousness of the modern church to the gravity of sin. He did it by talking about the pride and power of religion.

Paul Tillich thought the word sin had become meaningless through overuse and misuse. He sought for a better term and came up with alienation. All sin has that basic ingredient, he thought, in that it alienates people from God and people from each other.

All these ideas are in the Old Testament where sins are named as transgressions, which is the most profound word for human wrongdoing, as in Is. 59:12: "Our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us." This depicts sin as willful disobedience and as rebellion against God. It is more than the sin of weakness or ignorance. It means, as does the word for sin in the New Testament, "to miss the mark," but this is more than moral failure. It is to overstep

— transgress — what God has clearly set forth as law.

This is why the three cardinal sins are so serious. They transgress the command of God. The catalogues of sin in the Bible, such as David's list of six sins in Ps. 15 or Paul's list of 21 sins in Ro. 1:20-31, where if anywhere we have a biblical doctrine of sin, are listings of transgressions. They are all, whether doing evil to a neighbor, backbiting, deceit, covetousness, idolatry, or sodomy, in defiance of God's holy law. They are called transgressions. That word goes far in naming the crucial factor in man's life on this planet. Whatever else man is, he is a sinner, a transgressor of God's law.

Judaism has always been interested in the origin of sin, which it consistently attributes to the fall of Adam. One commandment was given to Adam and he disobeyed that commandment. Satan the tempter appealed to the lust for power in Adam, which is inherent in human beings. One line in the Bible says it all, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). Selfish ambition is what did Adam in, and that sin is in us all. The OT is not Calvinistic in that it teachers that all the children of Adam actually inherit his sin, but that we sin for the same reason he did, and that inclination to sin is with us from birth, even in us in our mother's womb, as one rabbi put it. One rabbi interpreted it to be saying in Gen. 8:21, "My sons, I created for you an evil impulse." If that isn't original sin, it is close to it. But the OT and the rabbis seem to be saying that the same thing that caused Adam to sin causes all of us to sin, our flawed nature, which must have been present with Adam even before he sinned. Gen. 4:7 says it well, "Sin coucheth at the door."

The NT writers not only trace sin to Adam in such language as "For in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22), but also to Cain, who was the first murderer, and that because he "was of the wicked one" (1 Jn. 3:12). Adam sinned against the sovereignty of God by desiring power of nature. Cain sinned against love and brotherhood by slaying his brother. Adam's sin was idolatry, Cain's murder. Our sinful pride makes it difficult for us to see ourselves in such sins, and yet Paul is saying that we all sin after the similitude of Adam, and John, while imploring us to love one another, urges us, "Be not like Cain." It is bad news, but we all must have something of Adam and Cain in us. But John at least sees us as free not to sin as grievously as Cain did. We may be inclined to kill (or hate) a brother, but we can appeal to the law of love. We may not be able to escape all sin, but we can avoid the hate and jealousy that caused Cain to cut his brother's throat.

The sacrificial system in the OT, a rather baffling subject to the Christian, serves to show us how seriously God views sin and how He intends that we also take sin seriously. It may strike the casual reader of the OT as grotesque that hordes of innocent animals would be slain and offered on an altar as a means of expiating sins. What possible effect could the blood of a quivering lamb have in assuaging man's inhumanity to man or to his rebellion against God?

One way to see it is that God needed some way to impress upon man the seriousness of his sins, and since "offering something" seems natural to man as a means of correcting some failure, it was reasonable for God to choose animal sacrifices as a way of making His point — that sin is flagrant and intolerable in the sight of God. One is inclined to turn away at the sight of a priest cutting the throat of an innocent victim and laying it on the altar to quiver and die. On a day that hundreds of animals were sacrificed the blood flooded in the trenches. It was a horrible, unthinkable scene, but that is what God intended. That is how gross sin is! Sin is so very bad that something has to be done about it. The sacrifice of an innocent animal was something to do. The shedding of innocent blood also prophetically pointed to the ultimate sacrifice that Christ would make as a lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

God gave Israel a reason for offering up an animal as a sin offering: " The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, by reason of the life" (Lv. 17:11). While animal sacrifices was part of the culture of nations outside Israel, the idea of life being in the blood was unique to Israel. That life was in the blood underscored the point of offering up the blood of an animal, for sin was deemed so serious by God that the life of the sinner itself had to be sacrificed. The wages of sin was indeed death. But God in His mercy allowed the people to sacrifice the blood of an animal instead of their own blood.

But the blood did not make atonement because of some magical quality in the blood. It was the divine will of God that by means of the animal's blood expiation for sin would be effected. It was the same with the blood of Christ, for his blood would have had the same chemical qualities of any other person's blood. It was God's will that Christ's blood would make the difference.

Israel's sacrificial system allowed for no forgiveness for the three deadly sins of murder, incest, and idolatry. They were high-handed sins and could not be expiated by the offering of an animal upon an altar. There was a "sin offering" for ordinary sins of human weakness, and there was a "guilt offering" for unintentional sins. But there was no rite of expiation for one who sinned presumptuously or with a high hand. It shows that even in the OT a difference was drawn between sins, some being considered more serious than others.

Even so, the sacrificial system is not the full story of how God dealt with His people in regard to sin. Even in the OT God reveals himself as ready to forgive sins of all kinds, apart from animal sacrifices. The basic sacrifice that God requires, whether in the OT or NT, is "a broken and contrite heart." That sacrifice is named in Ps. 51 as the one that God desires, and that psalm makes it clear that David, who committed two of the deadly sins, was forgiven due to the fact that he yielded himself to the mercy of God. David even says in that psalm that it is not animal sacrifices that God wants, but "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." The

psalmist grants that God will accept the offering of bulls, but what He wants most of all is the heart. Even high handed sins are forgiven when one humbles himself before God.

This is one of the themes of the prophets, not that they allow no place for the rite of sacrifice, but that God really wants a humble and contrite heart. This is especially evident in Micah 6 where the prophet answers the question, "Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?," negatively. And what does God really want, what does He really require? His answer: "to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God."

This is an important part of what the OT means to us. On the one hand God ordained a sacrificial system for his people in order to impress upon them the seriousness of their sins and to provide a way of dealing with them, which called for the sacrifice of innocent blood. On the other hand such rites were not what really counted with God, not ultimately at least, for out of His mercy He was ready to forgive all sins of those who came to Him in repentance and humility.

This means there isn't any difference between the God of the OT and the God of the NT. It is the same God, and His basic requirement has always been the same, contrition and repentance. Dispensations, ordinances, and rites differ, but these are, however important, subordinate to the one necessary thing, *sincerity before God.*

This lesson alone from the OT comes near teaching us all we need to know, whatever ordinances and rituals we look to as signs of fellowship with God, and that is that what God requires above all else is to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God. That is what religion is all about, and if that is missing nothing else really matters. — *the Editor*

The framework of the Old Testament as we know it today makes it clear that this God is the God of the whole world. But as the story unfolds, it also narrows down to tell us how he became a living reality in the life of a particular group of people. What God did for them was conceived on a grand, international scale. In its earliest episodes, it is a story that spans most of the ancient world, beginning with a childless couple — Abraham and Sarah — in the Mesopotamian city of Ur and leading on to a nation in a "land flowing with milk and honey."

In between, we have the immortal stories of Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, of Jacob, and of how his family unwittingly ended up as slaves in Egypt. This was one of the great low points of Israel's early history. But under Moses, a dynamic leader trained in the court of the Egyptian kings, it was to become the central focus of Israel's national consciousness. — John Drane in *Introducing the Old Testament*

We Must Cease Being Male-Dominated. . .

WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHURCH DO TO BE SAVED? (9)

If the Church of Christ is to have an effective witness going into the 21st century, it must make some changes in reference to the place of women in the church. These changes need not be what most of its members would consider radical changes, such as having women as elders or pulpit ministers, but they must be substantial enough to reflect a change in attitude and practice. If there is a concise way to say it it would be *the Church of Christ must cease being male-dominated.* Corporate worship is male-dominated, structures are male-dominated, teaching is male-dominated, decision-making is male-dominated. The over-all attitude is male-dominated.

It is not evident that we really believe, "In Christ there is neither male nor female," as Gal. 3:28 urges upon us. If that truth means anything it means that in the Body of Christ gender is not to be an issue. The Church of Christ must take steps to demonstrate that it really believes that oneness in Christ transcends gender. It means that when a member functions as part of the Body it will not matter what sex that member is, just as it will not matter what race the member is.

I submit a list of suggestions of what can be done immediately to help correct what might well be our most besetting sin, the way we treat our sisters in Christ. These are small steps to take, but they will prove liberating, and they are things we can do at once. Not a one of them would violate any Scripture, and they call only for an end to some of our traditions that have no validity. They are not necessarily listed in order of importance.

1. Let the women make some of the announcements and share in welcoming the visitors. This is an important part of the service in all our congregations, especially on Lord's day morning, but it is always done by men. In doing this they should stand before the congregation, behind the pulpit if need be, just as the men do. In my 60 years in the Church of Christ I have never seen a woman make the announcements or express a welcome. This is a simple matter. We can start next Sunday. This one change might do wonders, one being the congregation might better listen to the announcements! And visitors might feel more welcome!

2 Let our sisters be used in the "Call to Worship," which many of our churches are now having, or "start the service" in those that do not use that terminology. This part of our Sunday morning service could be greatly enriched, and our women would do it beautifully.

3. Let the women read the Scriptures as part of public worship. This too is hardly ever done in a Church of Christ, but it is a step that could easily be taken, next

Sunday. It could be the beginning of our taking the public reading of Scripture more seriously. Through the centuries the church catholic has taken seriously the public reading of the Bible, usually from both Testaments and at every service. Over and over again the NT urges upon us the public reading of the word of God. When we read the Bible at all it is rather poorly done and is not taken seriously. We would do well to follow "the church year" of selected passages, and thus join other churches in what is being read around the world in all the churches. It would be greatly enhanced if much of this were done by the women, who would be encouraged to prepare the week before for the Sunday readings.

4. Let the sisters be part of those who lead the public prayers. Only those who are gifted in this ministry should be used and not "just anybody as long as its a male," which is our present practice. Our prayers are often dull, repetitious, sterile, humdrum, and so often they are the same old thing sprinkled with Church of Christ cliches, such as "guide, guard, and direct," "ready recollection," and "if we have been found faithful." For the most part we are uncreative and unimaginative in our prayers. The one who leads seldom praises God and almost never lays bare the soul of the congregation before God. In short, we know almost nothing about leading God's people in prayer. We should have a prayer committee that meets through the week for prayer about leading prayer the next Sunday. Careful preparation should be made. Taking a congregation before the throne of God should be done with great reverence and seriousness. Let's start improving along these lines by turning some of it over to our sisters. Let a woman chair the prayer committee, and watch our prayers take on new life! Those who would deny a woman a part in "the prayers of the church" need to explain why it is that when we assemble in God's house and address Him as our heavenly Father that only His sons may address Him. We gather at His board and around His hearth but only the boys can talk to Him!

5. Let us use the sisters in the serving of the Supper. And while we are at it we need to scrutinize the tasteless way we do Communion. In our larger churches this part of our service begins with those who serve "lining up down front," usually by marching in from either side or down the aisles. There they stand, all men or boys, gazing at the rest of us and we gaze back. It is an awkward way to enter into an experience so sacred as the Lord's supper. Again, we need a worship committee to search out more appropriate ways to do Communion, and let an innovative-thinking sister and brother serve as co-chairpersons. We could start by visiting the Presbyterians and Episcopalians and see how they do it. The Episcopalians, for instance, have kneelers, and they break bread on their knees! A Jewish-Christian congregation I attended did not use matso crackers (Lord, forgive us!), but a loaf of bread that was broken and passed (no plate) among the believers. We mistakenly presume that the Scriptures prescribe unleavened bread. They do not. The record says, "Jesus took bread . . ." He took the bread common to his culture. If it was unleavened it was because that was all there was in the house since it was the Jewish

passover. He did not *choose* unleavened bread, and he did not prescribe such. If we do as he did, we would "take bread" common to our culture. When I was in Thailand we "took rice," caked like bread. I would suggest a large, handsome French loaf, for it beautifully represents the one Body of Christ. Let the sisters in on it. They'll find edifying ways to do the Supper.

6. Let the big girls serve as greeters and ushers and let the little girls take up and pass out the cards. Do you realize that a little girl in a Church of Christ grows up among us and never does a single thing? Little boys can pass out the cards but not the little girls. It only shows that we start male-domination early. A girl soon realizes that lines are drawn because "I'm not a boy," even among people who are supposed to believe that in Jesus Christ gender does not matter.

7. We must overcome the mentality that says a woman cannot teach a man. If we hold to this tradition by quoting Scripture, we must realize that the Bible can be quoted both ways on that point. We live in a world where women rule nations, govern states, serve in Congress, preside over large corporations and universities, and work as professors and teachers. They are engineers, judges, doctors, surgeons, architects, jet pilots, and TV news anchors. But in a Church of Christ a woman who serves as a professor of English at the local university cannot teach a class made up of men and women. She can't even teach a class with a 12-year old boy in it if he happens to have been baptized! We don't deserve to be saved if we do not shrug off such nonsense as that!

8. Let our women share in the decision-making process, including the hiring and firing of all church personnel. This can be done through the makeup of committees where women should serve as chairpersons as well as men. An advisory committee, a sizable one in our larger congregations, could serve the elders in studying problems and recommending solutions. The elders, both out of wisdom and for their own protection, should take seriously the advice of such an advisory council. I can see co-chairpersons of such a committee, one a man and one a woman, reporting to the elders "the mind of the congregation," to use a Quaker expression, on some issue before the church. Wise elders would be slow to act against the advice of such a group, half of whom should be women. This would distribute decision-making throughout the congregation, which is the way it should be in a democratic society, and it would draw upon the wisdom of our women. When there are congregational business meetings women should lead and be heard from as much as men.

9. We can start now in including women in the diaconate. Numerous references in the NT make it evident that women served as deacons (not deaconesses, no such term in the NT) in the earliest churches. There are encouraging signs that Churches of Christ have begun to consider the role of women as deacons, one being a book published in 1989 by Stephen Sandifer of the Southwest Central Church of Christ in Houston on *Deacons: Male and Female?* with the subtitle "A

Study for Churches of Christ." This book not only finds support for female deacons in the NT and early church fathers but from our own pioneers in the Restoration Movement as well. The author concludes that eventually the Churches of Christ might well have some congregations with no deacons at all, some with only male deacons, and some with deacons male and female, and all the options will have support in the NT and in the history of the church.

These are things we can do now, and we must begin liberating ourselves on this issue or we'll be left behind. One might argue that my position would call for women as public preachers and elders as well as these other ministries. Perhaps so, but we have to be realistic. Let's cross the bridges as we get to them. These are things that we can and must do now. Women elders and evangelists are bridges far down the road, bridges we may never come to.

It is like the Roman Catholic theologian I read lately who insists that the pope in Rome will one day be a woman. There is no doubt about it, he insists. It may be a long time in coming but it will come, he says. Well, the Churches of Christ may one day have women as elders and preachers, but it may be about the same time the Roman Catholics have a woman pope! The Roman Catholics, who have long been male-dominated in their services, have already begun to do a number of the things listed above, including women readers. We too can begin to change, now!

It is not my intention in this installment to deal at length with those passages in Paul that restrict the ministry of women, which are partly the cause of our male-domination, along with hearty doses of tradition and male chauvinism. All through the years we have quoted "Let the women keep silent in the churches," but we have made little effort to harmonize that with "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." which comes out of our favorite chapter, Acts 2. We quote "I suffer not a woman to teach or to usurp authority over a man, but to be in silence," but neglect those verses by the same apostle that allows a woman to speak and prophesy so long as she has her head covered.

Along the way we have made little effort to relate such divergence by an appeal to the key passage: "In Christ there is neither male nor female." We have a way of picking and choosing what we want from Scripture, based as much upon our prejudices as our passion for truth.

I have no interest in "explaining away" those verses where Paul orders women to be silent in church. As we say of other things, "He said what he meant and meant what he said." Those to whom he was writing should have heeded what he wrote as an apostle of Christ. The question for us is whether he would say the same thing to the churches of the 20th and 21st centuries. The NT makes no claim to be a detailed guide for all succeeding generations, certainly not on secondary issues. It is generally conceded that changing cultural conditions may effect the way a passage is to be applied.

We have no problem applying the label "Does Not Apply" to numerous things in the NT. The injunction to "Greet one another with a holy kiss" appears five times in the NT. A clear command, but we say that it does not apply to us as it stands. Culture, we say. Our Lord washed feet as an example to his followers, and accompanied it with a command to do likewise. Both an example and a command, but we do not take it at its face value, even though some Christians do. Culture, we say. The same is true of the woman's head covering and long hair. Even the four "necessary things" decided on by the apostles and the Holy Spirit in Acts 15:28-29 we have no problem ignoring with a clear conscience. Custom, we say. The same with the communal plan in the Jerusalem church of owning everything in common (Acts 4:32). When it comes to "approved example" we pick and choose as we will.

It should not be considered strange, therefore, for one to conclude that the restrictions placed on women in the churches of the first century by the apostle Paul were influenced by social factors that might change in succeeding generations. Paul yielded to other social pressures, such as slavery and racial sensitivities, even though he knew Christ transcended such barriers.

Our key passage in Gal 3:28 not only says there is neither male nor female in Christ, but neither Jew nor Greek and neither slave nor free. And yet Paul instructed slaves to submit to their masters, and he returned a runaway slave to his owner. He also circumcised a half-Jew and shaved his own head and took temple vows in order to satisfy Jewish racial prejudices. And yet he knew that "in Christ" there were no such differences.

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the apostle would enjoin things upon women that would serve to protect the church from undue criticism from outsiders. In Paul's world women were hardly more than chattel property. Their word did not count in a court of law. They did not speak in public, and walked not beside but behind their menfolk. In her own home she did not eat at the same table with men. It was part of the synagogue service that a man would thank God for two things, that he was not a Gentile and he was not a woman.

Couple this with the likelihood that when some Christian women realized they were free in Christ they may well have become overly enthusiastic in expressing themselves in church. So Paul laid down some restrictions, but it is a mixed bag. He says "It is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (Shameful before God or in the eyes of the public?), and yet he allows her to both pray and prophesy so long as her head is covered (Would this temper criticism from without?).

To apply this mixed bag, which is unclear at best, to all succeeding generations irrespective of changing customs is a bit much. Paul also says that "nature" teaches that it is a shame for a man to have long hair, but again he must be referring to local prejudices, for throughout history "nature" has taught no such thing. Jesus probably had long hair, and one dear soul by the name of Absalom in the OT had hair so long that it got caught in the branches of a tree!

Again, we must begin and end this question with the apostle's enduring principle, one that was revolutionary in its day: *In Christ there is neither male nor female*. Paul could not or would not fully implement this principle in his own situation, probably because of social pressures. The question for us in our day is whether we can and should fully implement it. In a world where women are increasingly gaining their civil rights and where they serve alongside men in all walks of life it is irresponsible for us to say to them that they can't speak in church.

The final arbiter on such matters is our Lord Jesus Christ. Even the apostle Paul said he is to be followed only as he followed Christ. And we can believe that Paul's "neither male nor female" principle came from Jesus Christ. Who can believe that Jesus, who scorned every social bias that separated people, is pleased with a male-dominated church? He talked openly to women when he wasn't supposed to, socialized with them, accepted service from "many women" (Lk. 8:3) who travelled with him, and even referred to one as "a daughter of Abraham" (Lk. 13:16), an unheard of expression in the male-dominated Jewish world.

The only hint that Jesus, like Paul, might have subordinated woman to man is that he did not choose a woman to be an apostle. But neither did he select a Gentile. His mission was to the Jews first, and the number twelve, no more and no less, was probably because what that number meant to the Jews, the twelve patriarchs, twelve tribes, etc. He was creating a witnessing Jewish community that by circumstance excluded women from the inner apostolic circle. But they were very much a part of his ministry and of his life, private and public. Even prostitutes!

In every generation Scripture must be interpreted in keeping with the Spirit of Christ. If an interpretation relegates women to a subordinate and demeaning role in a world where women are being liberated that interpretation must be suspect, either of being misunderstood or being misapplied to our day and time, for it is contrary to the Spirit of Christ.

It is not too late for the Church of Christ to be saved. Its women will help save it. But they have to be given a chance. — *the Editor*

Let Us Hear From You

This series on what the Church of Christ must do to be saved will not be complete without hearing from those of you who read the series, for you are out there among the congregations and you have your own idea about how things are going. As you see it, what changes, if any, should we be making? If you had a chance to have your say, what would you say we must do to be saved, if anything? Or if you are witness to changes already taking place, share it with us, for it would be encouraging to others. What do you see as our greatest strength, our most serious weakness, our most pressing need? We will not quote you if you request it, but it is important that you let us know what you are thinking on this crucial issue. — *the Editor*

THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES US ONE BY MAKING US LIKE CHRIST

We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. — 2 Cor. 3:18

It is a rule of life that we tend to become like what we continually gaze upon in admiration, if not in one way then in another. It is therefore important what heroes we choose to admire. Nathaniel Hawthorne was getting at this in his story about the Old Stone Face, which looked upon a village from its mountain perch. The village perpetuated the myth that a great leader would one day come to their town bearing the image of the Old Stone Face. A school boy, infatuated by the myth, grew up studying the face naturally etched in stone on the mountain, wondering who would one day come bearing its image.

The boy grew up anticipating every stranger and visitor to the city, but no one ever came who fit the description. At last when the boy was an old man and sitting on his porch with a neighbor, the neighbor, looking intently upon the stone face on the nearby mountain and then at the old man, cried out, "Clarence, you are the Old Stone Face!" Over the years the man became like what he had come to admire. It is a great and sobering truth, and that is the idea in 2 Cor. 3:18. The more we look upon Christ the more we become like him.

This is the mission of the Holy Spirit as the Guest of heaven within us. That is what the apostle says in making his point, "just as by the Spirit of the Lord." Phillips captures this beautifully in his translation: "We are transformed by the Spirit of the Lord in ever-increasing splendor into his own image."

It is wonderfully reassuring to realize God has given us His Spirit for the purpose of conforming us more and more into the image of Himself, through Jesus Christ. A Guest has come to make his home in our hearts so that we might become more and more like Jesus!

The context of 2 Cor 3:18 shows that the Jews did not understand the gospel message because a veil hung over their faces so they could not see. We are to conclude that this was their fault in that they did not want to understand. The apostle says "the veil is taken away" when one turns to Christ (verse 16). Then they will see Christ in all his glory, as if beholding him in a mirror. But the likeness of Christ is reflected on the beholder, so that he becomes like what he beholds in the mirror.

And so Paul says "we are being transformed into the same image," which refers to the here and now in this world. As Christians we are becoming more and more like Christ in this world and it will continue through eternity. This is the mission of the Holy Spirit, which is further evident from the fruit he seeks to bear in our lives: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-

control. This is another way of saying that the Spirit's mission in our lives is to make us Christlike, for these virtues are what it means to be like Christ. The Spirit makes us gentle women and gentle men because that is Christlike. We are like Christ when we are kind, good, and forbearing.

Christlikeness is thus the end in view of the Christian faith. While such judgments as "sound in faith" should refer to being like Jesus, it is often made to refer to being loyal to some party line. We have been more attentive to making people like us, like our party, than making them like Christ. It is sometimes tragically the case that the most Christlike members of a congregation are suspect for that very reason: they are more devoted to Jesus than to the party!

A good commentary on 2 Cor. 3:18 is Rom. 12:2 where the apostle pleads with his readers to "be transformed by the renewing of your minds." The idea of the passage is that they are to turn away from being like the world and become like Christ. He then makes a remarkable statement: "that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." We show what God's purpose is for His church when we become a transformed people by being like Christ.

This is why the church is referred to as the Body of Christ, "the fulness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). That says it all: the church is to be Jesus Christ in this world, his fulness, his likeness. But there is also reference to believers being "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), "until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19), "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), and "Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

This is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. When this is the case we are a united people — mutually like Christ even though different from each other. Christlikeness does not mean that we are carbon copies of each other. Unity among believers is thus the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That is why we are urged to preserve the unity of the Spirit "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2-3).

That is to say that the way to unity is Christlikeness. — *the Editor*

It often happens in life — indeed it happens daily — that we use a thing and benefit from a thing without being fully able to understand all about it. We use electricity without being able to define what electricity is or how it works. We use a motor car without being able to understand the theory of the working of the internal combustion engine. There is many a thing in this life which we know by its effects. For many of us that will be true also of the Holy Spirit. We need not get lost in the mysteries of the Trinity to experience the power of the Holy Spirit; and it will be to the good of our souls to go to the Bible and to meditate on what the Bible says about the work of the Spirit of God in the lives of men, in order that we may lay hold on that power for our own lives.— William Barclay in *The Promise of the Spirit*

WE COULD UNITE EXCEPT FOR PREACHERS

Were it not for the preachers Christians would unite upon the Bible alone in less than a year, in my judgment. — Letter from John T. Johnson to Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1842, p. 479.

One can learn a lot about our heritage in the Stone-Campbell movement by reading the belles lettres written on the frontier. These were often reports from evangelists in the field, and they appeared in most of the early journals. Alexander Campbell's paper, the *Millennial Harbinger,* published hundreds of these through the years under such titles as "Reports From the Churches" and "Progress of Reform." It might be said that in these letters one sees the guts of the Movement, for workers in the field were pouring out their hearts in reference to the gnawing problems they faced combating sectarianism, infidelity, and ungodliness on the American frontier.

One problem they faced, for instance, was the lack of workers. B. F. Hall wrote to Campbell in 1839 and asked, "How shall we procure preachers and pastors to take care of the numerous flocks we already have?" An evangelist wrote from Minerva, Ohio that "the deceitfulness of riches and the spirit of speculation" were obstacles to his ministry, but by the power of the gospel he was overcoming. He reported 35 additions in a few weeks of preaching. Such reports were typical, for they were eager to share their successes and failures, their hopes and misgivings. Their letters were like war bulletins from the battlefield to headquarters. Our people had no hierarchy to report to, so they turned to "the editor bishops."

In the letter quoted above from John T. Johnson, who, having once served in the U.S. Congress, resigned to become "the evangelist of Kentucky" who brought thousands to Christ, tells of preaching every day for eight weeks in a row and baptizing 238! He plead for more evangelists in the field. "We are under obligation to have evangelists preaching the gospel all over the United States," he told Campbell.

It is in that context that he tells Campbell that they would be able to unite all the Christians in only a year except for the preachers. Johnson was the kind of man that deserved to be heard. On another occasion he wrote Campbell that their efforts needed better organization. Now he scores the preachers as being the real cause for the divisions among Christians. But for them we could unite the Christians without delay, he complains. We are to understand that he was talking about the clergy of the established churches of his day, not his own colaborers.

This aside to Campbell is one more small clue as to the purpose of the Movement, as those who launched it saw it. Evangelist Johnson was in the field not only to win them but to blend them. Like other leaders of the Movement, Johnson wanted to unite the Christians in all the sects. This confirms Robert Richardson's

statement that the Movement was "born with a passion for Christian unity, and unity has been its consuming theme." We are to assume that Johnson was dead serious in what he said about the preachers. They not only do not help in the work of unity, as one might suppose, they are a hindrance, he was telling Campbell.

As one views the history of the church in all its factions and fragments, she can tell that Johnson has a point. It is nearly always some preacher who starts another sect. It is the clergy that creates the issues and keeps them alive, drawing lines of fellowship along the way. It is ministers that create parties and make themselves wing commanders. Johnson would have smiled understandingly over the statement made by a brother who was attending one of our unity meetings. In response to a question of what might be done to restore unity in our ranks, he blurted out, "Shoot all the preachers!"

And yet we must acknowledge that Johnson, not to mention the brother at the unity meeting, was indulging in overstatement, especially when we relate it to our own time. We all know many preachers who are part of the answer rather than the problem when it comes to a concern for unity. Lots of good work has been done toward healing our divisions, and it is often led by preachers.

But still we should take heed to what truth there is in what Johnson said to Campbell. It could serve as a warning to preachers to take heed lest they contribute to our ugly habit of making divisions and preserving them. Preachers can be busy preaching the gospel and edifying the saints without having to create issues that are divisive. A minister can be Christ's man without being a party man. He may have opinions so long as he holds them as opinions, and not be pushy with them. Preachers might also get out of the way more than they do and let lay people take the lead.

Johnson's judgment may strike close to home when we look at all the schisms that have occurred among Churches of Christ/Christian Churches this century. A new tract by one Ralph L. Wilson of Talco, Texas entitled "The Church of Christ and The Unwritten Creed" reminded me of what Johnson said about preachers. The tract charges that while the Churches of Christ have no written creed they are nonetheless creed-bound with many unwritten creeds. This is what it has to say about preachers:

> The preacher gets the unwritten Creed at college or from some influencial preacher and he spreads it the same as other denominations with their Creeds; with one exception, it is unwritten. At least it is not compiled and labeled. As a result there are 20 different Churches of Christ. You see, our Creeds differ. We differ in some ways, but we each say: "We are not a denomination, we are the true and only church." Isn't that nice? We all now have a Church of Christ of our choice. What egotism! What a shame!

The author of the tract places much of the blame on the preachers. They tell us what to think and believe, he charges, and they cut off any discussion that questions their assumed prerogatives. He names a number of issues that cannot be freely discussed in many Churches of Christ, such as marriage and divorce, on which he takes a more liberal view. When we are wrong, he says, we can't effect a change because we are creed-bound, with the preachers standing guard.

The brother does have a case to make, doesn't he? These days we have "the pulpit minister," an oddity for a people who claim to follow the New Testament pattern. And "the pulpit" belongs to "the pulpit minister," and he always fills it. If he is out of town, someone of like kind is imported to fill the pulpit, often one of his choice. The preacher usually controls what is said. If elders get in his way, he is often able to replace them with men of his own choice. The intelligent "layman," however gifted and however spiritual, is hardly ever heard in a Church of Christ pulpit, for it is the professional minister's domain. When creeds are made and enforced as tests of fellowship, it is usually the work of preachers.

In the tradition of our great evangelist, John T. Johnson, we must face up to the sobering biblical truth that division is a sin. It is a sin to create division within the Body of Christ and it is a sin to preserve those divisions. To the extent that the preachers have been responsible, to that extent the preachers must repent and change their ways. They must cease being piecemakers and become peacemakers. They must pursue the things that make for peace among sisters and brothers, not discord. And how the God of heaven will bless them when they make such a change in their ministry! And how much more joyous their ministry will be!

We have many preachers among us who urge our people "to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and, like the apostle Paul, they call upon our churches to manifest forbearing love toward those who differ with them. May their tribe increase! And down the road there will be note taken and letters written about how the preachers of our generation became, like Thomas Campbell, "sick and tired of sectarian strife," and joined ranks to restore that Christlike spirit that joins us together in joyous fellowship. — *the Editor*

OUR CHANGING WORLD

Lately Ouida and I have been reading in bed to each other Carl Ketcherside's *Pilgrimage of Joy*, which was originally published in serial form in this journal. It has been so long that it was as if we had never read it, and we found it both delightful and nostalgic. It was like another visit with Carl, with the humor as impressive as ever. He tells how the folk in the church he grew up in were slow readers and sometimes misunderstood what a verse said, such as the dear old sister who read, "Jacob stole away from Laban unawares," and understood it to say that Jacob stole away from Laban in his underware!

Ouida's care of Mother Pitts has become more critical of late in that her mother seems to be no longer capable of bearing any of her own weight when we move her, as we

do several times a day. She collapses on us and has to be carried, which is sometimes painful for her. Ouida talked to her doctor and he advises that from this point on she might have to be bedfast. We follow our old rule of taking the days one at a time and so far we are making it. Ouida still has one day out during the week for Bible study (?) with "the girls" and shopping, while I keep the store.

My dear old friend Perry Gresham, one time president of Bethany College, sent me a sample of the column he does for *The West Virginia Hillbilly* entitled "The Old Professor." In this installment he wrote on an old Scottish toast, "May the hinges of friendship never rust, and may the wings of love never lose a feather." He noted that friendship requires an exchange of greeting and a bit of conversation from time to time lest its hinges grow rusty. He said it is sad to see old couples quarreling and yelling at each other in anger and hate. They are like sparrows caught in a badminton game. Love finds soaring difficult when too many feathers have been lost.

At their recent annual gathering in Boston of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, the officials reaffirmed their belief that divine healing has an important role in humanity's search for better health. They observed that Christians of many denominations are today involved in healing through prayers for the sick. More and more people have found Christian healing a practical possibility. Such gatherings of Christian Science leaders are never given to argument or debate, and no votes are taken. Final decisions are made by a five-member self-perpetuating board of directors, which oversees 2,600 churches in 68 countries. Each church is, however, congregational in government. The Mother Church in Boston is central headquarters as well as a congregation. To belong to the Mother Church one must make application. It has members from 55 nations, but it is against the bylaws to reveal the number of members.

There is still one town in the world that speaks the language of Jesus in its daily affairs. Maaloula, Syria, tucked in the mountains 40 miles from Damascus, speaks Aramaic just as Jesus did. Aramaic was once spoken all across the Middle East, but it is now virtually extinct, and the encroachment of the modern world threatens its use in Maaloula. While in the time of Jesus Greek was widely spoken, the Jews continued to speak Aramaic. Our English Bibles have a few lines in Aramaic, such as Jesus' prayer on the cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?"

The World Bible Translation Center, a Church of Christ mission with offices in Fort Worth, Tx., sponsors a Moscow Bible Center in Russia. It reports that since the attempted coup the people are more interested than ever in the Bible and things religious. A Church of Christ of a dozen are so members now meets in the Moscow Center, and each Sunday they have more visitors than they have members. The mission plans to open other Bible centers in Russia. Part of their mission is to distribute Russian Bibles to those who request them. Thus far 600,000 have been printed and distributed.

If you wonder how Billy Graham managed to have 250,000 people for his one-day crusade in New York City's Central Park, the largest crowd ever to gather in the park, it was because a lot of legwork was done. Hundreds of volunteers blitzed the city distributing two million visitation brochures door-to-door, in subway and bus stations, and in the streets. Fifty teams of street evangelists held rallies a week before the big event. Materials were distributed in 16 different languages. Some 500 churches of 40 denominations cooperated, including vigorous support from Roman Catholics who had 200 parishes preparing for the event. Graham's theme was the love of God, drawn from Jn. 3:16. Is this an example of the unity we talk about?

We regret to report the death of Jim Hance, an old friend who has written for this paper in years past. He was recently killed along with his wife in an auto accident near Hamilton, Texas. Two cars met in a fierce head-on collision, killing three people in each car. All six were members of the Church of Christ. Jim was a delightful person and a preacher of the grace of God. He once ministered to a Church of Christ here in Denton.

READER'S EXCHANGE

In regard to a proclamation declaring our repentance for the sectarian nature of our movement, I would be happy to sign it. It has been my observation that the independent Christian Churches, with which I am associated, are as fiercely sectarian as the non-instrument Churches of Christ. While I appreciate my heritage in the Restoration Movement, I find that the best way to express unity with the Body of Christ is to participate in cross-denominational activities. — *Roger Beard, pastor, Parkcrest Christian Church, Long Beach, Ca.*

I preach for a non-instrument Church of Christ in Medicine Hat, Alberta. As in most Churches of Christ, there is a large percentage of members who believe using instruments in worship does not violate God's word in any way. They even believe that not using instruments has held the church back. But I cannot see any way to begin using instruments without causing division on the homefront and upheaval in virtually every family because of the network of relatives and friends who would not understand. — *Bob Shaw, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada*

What a pleasure it is for those of us who have run the race to keep on jogging. — *Perry Gresham, Bethany, WV.*

Your publication has been a major source of spiritual support for me over all these years. I suppose all good things do eventually come to an end. — *Virginia Crawford, Melvin, Ky.*

I acknowledge a woman's right to do what she wishes with her own body, just as she has the right to do what she wishes with her own house. The owner of a house is certainly entitled to seal off one room in the house when she so chooses. If, however, that room contains a baby who will be destroyed by this action, the right of the baby to live must take precedence. — *Fred Scharz, M.D., Long Beach, Ca.*

I appreciate your paper, especially your promotion of free thought amongst us. — *Ken Luke, Ellenwood, Ga.*

In reading Carl Ketcherside's *Pilgrimage of Joy* I wondered how anyone could be treated the way he was and take the abuse he did and call it a pilgrimage of joy. I suppose he could say there was more good times than bad. I've come to believe that if we want the unity of the Spirit we must practice the fruit of the Spirit. — *Seth Dodge, Dallas, Or.*

You and Carl Ketcherside helped me to see the freedom in Christ. Before that I felt nailed to a set of rules. Thank you for all those years. — *Tena Carmack, Curve, Tn.*

BOOK NOTES

We are pleased with the interest shown in our bound volumes. We still have available seven bound volumes, including the years 1977-89, except 1979-80 (12 years in all) for only $70.00 postpaid. The last bound volume entitled *The Hope of the Believer* for 1989-90 is $15.00 postpaid. These are handsome matching volumes with dust jackets.